



HAWTHORNE
Fine Art

WILLIAM HART (1823—1894)

View of Mount Chocorua

Oil on canvas

12 ½ x 20 ½ inches

Signed lower right

An esteemed and significant second generation Hudson River School painter, William Hart is primarily known for his finely detailed, bucolic American landscapes. He was born in Kilmarnock, Scotland in 1823, and immigrated with his family to Albany, New York when he was eight years old. His younger siblings, James McDougal Hart (1828—1894) and Julie Hart Beers (1835—1913), also went on to become accomplished landscape painters. The Hart brothers began their artistic careers painting decorative side-panels for a coach-maker in the Albany-Troy area.

Around the age of eighteen, Hart pursued a career as a portrait painter, touring the Midwestern states in search of commissions. In 1849, with funding from one Dr. Ormsby, he traveled to Scotland to study landscape painting. Upon his return to the United States in 1853, Hart established his studio in New York City. His landscape paintings, which skillfully blend realism of detail and idealism of spirit, soon captured the interest of art critics and collectors. He received positive reviews in *The Crayon* and *The Cosmopolitan Art Journal*. These journals also published notes on his whereabouts and activities, a level of attention reserved for the most renowned American painters, such as Frederic Edwin Church (1826—1900), John F. Kensett (1816—1972), Jasper F. Cropsey (1823—1900), and Asher B. Durand (1796—1886)—a testament to Hart’s rising importance.

Hart was elected as an associate member of the National Academy of Design in 1855 and a full member in 1858. He served as the first president of the Brooklyn Academy of Design in 1865, and as the founding president of the American Society of Watercolorists. By 1879, his landscape paintings of New York, Maine, New Hampshire, Virginia, and Michigan, according to one contemporaneous critic, could be found “in almost all the principal private collections in the



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Atlantic cities.”¹ Hart’s paintings now reside in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the National Gallery of Art, Washington; and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C.; among many others.

This painting is an excellent example of the type of bucolic landscape scenes that made Hart so popular. Watering cows, such as the ones depicted here, are recurring subjects in Hart’s oeuvre; he considered them to be more “natural” than a human presence. Hart’s grandson, the author and humorist E.B. White, recalled of his grandfather: “He was particularly excited by landscapes that contained cows. Many of his best and most ambitious oils featured cattle. I have seen some of sketchbooks: they are loaded with details of udders, rear ends, heads, horns and hooves.”²

In this painting, a group of cows are drinking from the banks of a quiet mountain river. The cloudy sky over them causes their reflection, as well as that of the autumn foliage of the trees above them, to blur in the river’s waters. Consequently, the animals blend into the composition as if they and the mountains around them are one. The mountains in the distance are New Hampshire’s White Mountains, with Mount Chocorua on the left. Mount Chocorua marks the end of the Sandwich Range, and while it is not particularly outstanding for its height, the peak does offer excellent views of the surrounding lakes, mountains, and forests. Furthermore, Mount Chocorua can be seen from almost any direction in New Hampshire. Hart capitalized on the mountain’s natural advantages in this work. He communicates the profound sense of natural serenity of this well-known peak, and is a wonderful example of his depictions of the American idyll for which he is best known.

¹ Mark Sullivan, *James and William Hart: American Landscape Painters* (Philadelphia: John F. Warren, 1983): 6.

² E.B. White in Dorothy Lobrano Guth, ed., *Letters of E.B. White: Collected and edited by Dorothy Lobrano Guth* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976): 4.